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"IRAN PUGS"
SUB. ACT'VS IN
IRAN

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USSR - IRAN - IRAQ

Moscow continues to curry favor with Iran over the U.S. hostage crisis even as Soviet commentary has underlined the USSR's discomfort over continuing instability in the Persian Gulf region and the radical aspects of Iranian policies. Soviet media have predictably condemned the Carter administration's new diplomatic and economic sanctions against Tehran, citing them to support a contention that it is Washington, not Moscow, that poses a threat to the nations in the area. At the same time, authoritative IZVESTIYA political observer Aleksandr Bovin has reiterated a characteristically more balanced view of U.S. interests in the region--expressing opposition to the holding of diplomatic hostages and acknowledging the legitimacy of Western concerns over the security of Middle East oil supplies. Moscow's anxiety over Tehran's desire to export its revolution to neighboring Islamic populations has been reflected in its guarded position on the growing and unpredictable dispute between Iran and Iraq.

USSR ASSAILS SANCTIONS, ACKNOWLEDGES WEST'S INTERESTS IN GULF

Moscow's initial reaction to President Carter's 7 April announcement of the break in U.S.-Iranian diplomatic relations and the tightening of the U.S. trade embargo against Iran came in an unsigned TASS article on the 8th, subsequently carried in all Soviet central newspapers and quoted in Persian-language commentaries beamed to Iran. The hostage question, TASS said, stands on a plane "utterly different" from that on which President Carter placed it in his announcement of the break with Iran. The assertion that the Iranians refuse to release the hostages is "wrong," TASS declared, since the "Iranian leadership"--not further identified--has repeatedly reaffirmed its readiness to resolve the question when the United States exhibits a "constructive approach" to Iran's "legitimate wishes." U.S. actions, it said, are guided by "undisguised imperialist interests," not by concern for the hostages. Further criticizing the U.S. stance, TASS Director General Sergey Losev, in an English-language commentary broadcast to North America on 10 April, replayed a theme appearing in Soviet commentaries for some weeks: The administration, Losev charged, "masterminded" the crisis, and Washington is now attempting to "blackmail" its closest allies into supporting its steps against Iran.

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Along with standard Soviet rhetoric about U.S. use of the hostage problem both for electoral purposes and for furthering Washington's designs against Tehran, Moscow, for the first time in months, has again avowed Soviet support for the principle of diplomatic immunity. IZVESTIYA authoritative political observer Aleksandr Bovin, in a 12 April article, restated the USSR's "principled stand" on the question, declaring that the "norms of international law must be strictly observed." As in earlier comment, Bovin made no direct call for the hostages' release and went on to accuse the United States of using the hostage question to build up its military presence in the region.

An unusual, if not unique, reference to Soviet approval of international calls for the release of the hostages came in an otherwise routine article by Viktor Vladimirov in the 10 April SOVIET RUSSIA. Apparently alluding to the Soviet Union's affirmative vote on the 4 December 1979 UN Security Council resolution, which called on Iran to release the hostages, Vladimirov said the seizure of the hostages was "illegal" from the viewpoint of international law, adding that the international community, "including the Soviet Union, has advocated their release."

Moscow has continued to reiterate support for Iran's "anti-imperialist" struggle in broadcasts for Iranian audiences, which, like other Soviet comment, periodically indicate approval of Iran's demands for the return of the Shah and his "plundered" wealth. Moscow radio's veteran Persian-service commentator Vera Lebedeva, in a formulation reminiscent of her 6 November 1979 talk--which characterized the "anger of the Iranian nation and its youth" against the United States as "totally understandable and logical"--declared in an 8 April commentary that it was natural under present circumstances for the USSR to support Iran's "just acts."

GULF SECURITY, OIL ISSUES In emphasizing the alleged danger of a U.S.-instigated military confrontation in the region, and the U.S. allies' hesitation in coming to Washington's support, Moscow has again offered assurance that it understands Western concerns regarding access to Persian Gulf oil. PRAVDA's Vsevolod Ovchinnikov, in a 10 April article, charged Washington with using the threat of military action to "blackmail" both Iran and U.S. allies "dependent on oil supplies from the Persian Gulf." IZVESTIYA's Bovin was more explicit. In effect echoing Brezhnev's February election speech remark, Bovin said in his 12 April article that the Soviet Union does not need Middle East oil and "will not go to war over it," and at the same time it understands "what the

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oil means for the Western states' economies" and is "prepared to allow for that."* Despite his disavowal of Soviet interest in Gulf oil, Bovin did make a cryptic connection in a remark the next day on Moscow radio's weekly roundtable program: "The interests of many parties" are affected by the U.S.-Iranian problem, he said-- "those who are interested in Middle East oil, those who border on the region." Soviet interest in regional developments was pointed up in an Arabic-language commentary on the 13th, which remarked that the Middle East lies close to the Soviet Union, and Soviet citizens "do not adopt an indifferent attitude toward the currents that have been raging in this area."

BILATERAL FRICTIONS EVIDENT AS USSR HEDGES ON IRAQ-IRAN TENSION

Trying to avoid siding with or offending either party in the Iranian-Iraqi dispute, Moscow has dealt cautiously with reports of border clashes and the escalating war of words between Baghdad and Tehran. Brief, selective TASS reporting has contained suggestions of both pro-Iranian and pro-Iraqi tilts, depending on which side's version was being cited. Moscow has suggested that both sides are at fault and that neither would be the victor in any conflict.

Moscow's only comment on the situation thus far came in the weekly roundtable program on Moscow radio's domestic service on the 13th, on which panelists discussed the "big tangle" of ideological, political, religious, and nationalistic aspects of the dispute. On the one hand, they speculated on possible Iraqi territorial claims on the Iranian province of Khuzestan, noting that it is populated by Arabs and is Iran's most important oil-producing province. On the other hand, they found it "disconcerting" that Iran was inclined toward exporting its ideas of Islamic revolution to "surrounding countries"--perhaps an oblique reference to Iranian leaders' statements about the Muslims of the Soviet Union--and especially disconcerting for Iraq because of direct Iranian appeals to the Iraqi people to overthrow their regime. IZVESTIYA's Bovin raised the possibility of a wider Arab-versus-Iranian aspect of the conflict, observing that Arab countries were generally moving toward support of Iraq and that Tehran was beginning to say that "Arabism is opposed to Islamism." The panelists indicated distaste for the "mutual accusations" leveled by Baghdad and Tehran, and agreed that neither side "needs this conflict."

* Brezhnev's remark and a subsequent TASS commentator's proposal for an "all-European" conference on oil issues are discussed in the TRENDS of 27 February 1980, pages 1-2, and 5 March 1980, pages 1-4.

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SOVIET-IRANIAN RELATIONS Moscow's relations with Tehran, strained by Iranian criticism of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and by Ayatollah Khomeyni's and Iranian President Bani-Sadr's frequent denunciations of the "two superpowers," were further aggravated by the recent breakdown of bilateral talks on the price of Iranian gas exported to the USSR. Iranian Ambassador to the USSR Mokri apparently compounded Moscow's difficulties with the Khomeyni regime when he declared in a recent Moscow press conference, according to Tehran radio, that Iran expected the USSR to stop exporting weapons to Iraq. TASS on the 11th, reporting the press conference, cited Mokri as saying that Iran and the Soviet Union have friendly, good neighborly relations regardless of their differences of opinion in the economic field and on "a number of political problems." But it evaded his remarks on Iraq, noting only that the ambassador "dwelled at length" on the state of Iranian-Iraqi relations, presenting "the position of the Iranian side."

Moscow has also failed to acknowledge the Iranian Revolution Council's November 1979 abrogation of the two clauses of the 1921 Soviet-Iranian treaty stipulating the conditions under which the parties may enter each other's territory. However, a 13 April commentary broadcast in Arabic suggested that Moscow still regards the treaty as valid. The treaty with Iran, the radio declared, along with the Soviet Union's other 1921 treaties, with Turkey and Afghanistan, are "to this day" a "brilliant example of agreements of friendship and equality of rights among states."

SOVIET-IRAQI RELATIONS Moscow's observance of the anniversary of the April 1972 Soviet-Iraqi friendship treaty again points to the tension in bilateral relations evident last year, when the USSR first downgraded the ritualistic message of congratulations.* This year's message, like last year's, was sent by the Supreme Soviet Presidium and the Council of Ministers, rather than by Brezhnev personally, as had been the practice earlier. Last year TASS reported that the treaty anniversary was observed at a meeting at Moscow's Friendship House, during which the Iraqi Ambassador characterized Iraqi-Soviet relations as "on an upward trend." No such meeting was reported this year, and the absence seemed to be pointed up by PRAVDA's brief report on the 8th that the Iraqi charge d'affaires ad interim in Moscow had held a reception the previous day to mark the 33d anniversary of the establishment of the Ba'th Party.

Judging by recent comments from Moscow and Baghdad, the Ba'thist regime's treatment of Iraqi communists and Moscow's parsimony in

* For a discussion of last year's and earlier messages, see TRENDS, 25 April 1979, pages 7-9.

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supplying Iraq with arms continue to strain bilateral relations. A commentary broadcast in Arabic on Moscow's "unofficial" Radio Peace and Progress (RPP) in early March criticized "some reactionary leaders in Iraq" for allegedly distorting the history of the Iraqi Communist Party and labeling Iraqi communists "agents and traitors and accusing them of having foreign connections, and other such lies." The RPP commentator, Sa'di al-Malih, assailed "these leaders," whose hands were "stained with the blood of scores of martyrs recently," for their hostility to communism and the Soviet Union and "everything progressive in Iraq." Iraqi communists, al-Malih declared, see "no conflict" between deepening friendship with the USSR and their "national struggle" and will continue to pursue these aims "in spite of the shrieks of reactionaries." Quoting an unnamed "poet," al-Malih observed rhetorically that it was impossible for a "monkey" to destroy the party.

Saddam Husayn, for his part, hinted at Iraq's dissatisfaction with past Soviet arms deliveries in a 27 March speech at a pan-Arab conference in Baghdad. Referring to earlier Iraqi-Iranian hostilities--ended with the help of Algerian mediation in 1975--Husayn recalled that "all our arms" at the time had come from the USSR. However, suggesting that Moscow had held back on arms deliveries at a critical time in the fighting, he added: "Had we got enough ammunition, we would have continued fighting the shah up to today."

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C U B A

HAVANA ALLOWS EXIT OF "CRIMINALS" IN ROW WITH LIMA, CARACAS

Cuba has tried to turn the embarrassment of a mass exodus of disaffected citizens to its own political advantage by accusing Peru and Venezuela, as well as the United States, of encouraging Cuban malcontents and then refusing to accept responsibility for the would-be emigrants. The government's offer to permit a mass departure was triggered ostensibly by the death of a Cuban guard while attempting to prevent a group of Cuban asylum-seekers from forcibly entering the Peruvian Embassy grounds. Announcement of the removal of the guards and permission for the emigration of "despicable elements" spurred an estimated 10,000 would-be emigres to take refuge at the Peruvian Embassy. Havana's departure from its customary restrictive stands on political asylum and emigration seems prompted by a desire to relieve pressures stemming from the deteriorating economic situation and attendant social problems.

Moscow thus far has ignored the current imbroglio except for a TASS dispatch replaying Havana's version of the dispute with Peru and Venezuela. And IZVESTIYA, in an otherwise innocuous report on Cuba's socialist advances, briefly conceded on the 8th that there are some problems with food and other shortages.

STATEMENTS ON EMIGRATION The surge of Cuban citizens to the Peruvian Embassy began after the Cuban Government in a 4 April statement announced the removal of police protection at the mission and Havana's "preparedness" to withdraw Cuban guards from "any other embassy that does not collaborate in its own protection." In its statement the government did not appear to extend an outright offer to allow a wholesale departure of disenchanted Cubans; it merely noted that it was "not opposed" to Cubans' emigrating to Peru or Venezuela "through regular channels if they want to do so, regardless of their criminal record." But Cuba expanded the offer the next day in a Foreign Ministry "clarification," which, according to PRENSA LATINA, authorized "any Cuban who so desires to emigrate to Peru, Venezuela, or any country that will give them a visa." The government and Foreign Ministry statements specifically withheld safe passage out of Cuba for those who had entered the Peruvian Embassy by force--crashing the embassy gates--"while Cuban guards were posted there."

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